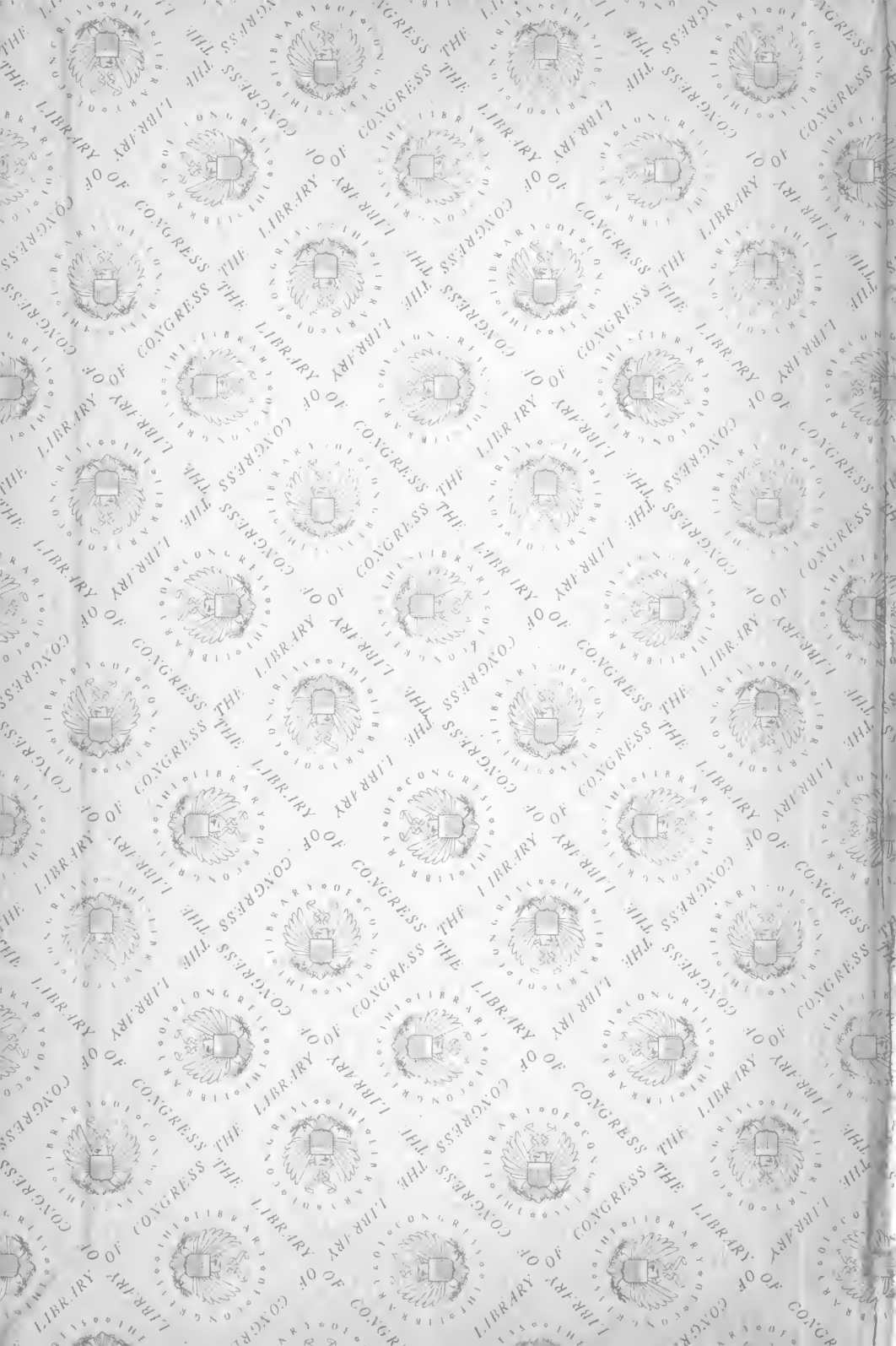


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GRANNY MAUMEE
THE RIDER OF DREAMS
SIMON THE CYRENIAN



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Granny Maumee
The Rider of Dreams
Simon The Cyrenian

Plays for a Negro Theater

BY
RIDGELY TORRENCE
|

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GRANNY MAUMEE

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SCENE: *Living room in an old cabin with walls blackened by age. Red cotton curtains and red covers on the chairs and table. In left corner back, an open fire smoulders in a great rough fireplace. There is a door at back leading out of doors. There are also doors left and right. A bed at left covered with a white counterpane. The room is neat and there are many growing flowers about potted in rude wooden boxes. Toward the right is an iron flower stand consisting of a basin mounted on a tripod. This stand is filled with a mass of bright red geraniums. A large chest against the wall at right is covered with red. A table near centre bears candles. Beside the table in a high-backed chair sits GRANNY MAUMEE. She is seen to be blind. She is black and thin, with white hair and a face so seared by burns that it masks her great age. Her great granddaughter PEARL, a girl of nineteen, is moving briskly about the room straightening chairs and rearranging flowers.*

PEARL

Seem kinder funny fer me to be fixin' up for Sapphie. Seem like I'm wukin' for her by the day. Mebbe she will tek'n hiah me now she's married. Seem kinder odd to be hiahed by a blood sisteh.

GRANNY

Spread my fine-spun sheets on de baid.

PEARL

I got the nex' bes'.

GRANNY

Fol' um up an' git out de fines'.

PEARL

Hit weahs um out so to wash um, an' Sapphie an' that man of her'n aint used to such goodness. An' to muss um up des for one night!

GRANNY

Hit's de night er all nights. Hit's de boy babe wif 'em dat I wants de fineness fer.

PEARL

That's right, the baby. I keeps fohgittin' hit. I'll change'm. I'll git the linum sheets on an' then I'll lay the big covehled.

'She draws coverlid off, hauls box from under

*the bed, and opening it takes out bed clothes
and remakes the bed.]*

You'n me'll have to lay in the broke baid this night. You won't git no rest.

GRANNY

No matteh, heah's a good baid fer de babe an' I'll soon git all my res'.

PEARL

I hope's Sapphie's husband aint too hefty, for the th'ee might break this heah'n same as the otheh'n is broke.

GRANNY

De husban' shain't sleep da nohow. You c'n lay him a bunk in de wash house.

PEARL

What! You aint goin' to leave him lay heah?

GRANNY

Dis baid my Sam bought fo' me. Onliest man kin eveh lay in hit shill be Sam's own blood. De babe an' his motheh'll lay heah dis night erlone.

PEARL

Well, the babe'll have plenty room and softness.

GRANNY

W'en my Sam wuz er babe we laid on cotton sack. We didn' have no baid, an' w'en he little shaveh he say, "Mammy, I goin' git you nice baid w'en I git er man." An' sho' nuff, w'en he grow up he took'n do hit, an' he mek pu'chus in de attelnoon an 'de baid come nex' day. But at midnight betwix' dee tuk'n bu'nt 'im.

PEARL

Now, Granny—

GRANNY

In de black dahk dee come on 'im, de bloody-handed mens, an' wheah dee cotch 'im dah dee bu'nt 'im, de right man settin' de wrong man afieh at de i'un hitchin' pos'.

PEARL

[*Going to her.*] Granny Maumee, don't leave yo'self go that away. Don't leave youah mine run on.

GRANNY

[*Rocking back and forth.*] My Sam, my man babe-um.

PEARL

Hit git you all wuk up an' wore out. You won't look good to company.

GRANNY

Look! Has I looked fo' fifty yeah sence I rush in de fieh fo' my Sam, which hit de las' sight deze eyes seen? Oh, whuffo' dee drag me out an' hilt me back? I bo' one man an' him dee tuk'n bu'nt. An' 'e slep' right'n dis room w'en de man wuz shot w'ich dee 'cuze 'im er! Whuffo' dee drag me back f'um de fieh?

PEARL

I sees the wisdom of Gawd in hit, Granny Maumee. Fifty yeahs ergo me and Sapphie's granpap been burnt and yet you was to live to git a new Sam.

GRANNY

W'ich 'e neveh come. Dee wuz all gals fum dat on, you an' yo' sisteh Sapphie an' yo' mammy an' yo' mammy's mammy, all down from my breas': all gals.

PEARL

You fuhgits what Sapphie's fetchin' you.

GRANNY

Dat I don't, but not twell I sees 'im will Sam be cool off in my heaht.

PEARL

Granny, you can nurse the child but course you cain't espect to see him.

GRANNY

Deze eyes shill yit behole—

PEARL

No, Granny Maumee, your eyes they're scorched and swiveled with the fire. But your arms ain't burnt, is they? An' they shall hold the baby! Tain't often old person live to heft a great-great-gran'baby.

GRANNY

Befo' my las' houah deze eyes shill look an' see ergin. [*She rises.*]

PEARL

Wheah you goin'?

GRANNY

Has you lay out my raid gown?

PEARL

Yes, it's all on the sofy.

GRANNY

Den I goes to primp up an' mek ready to receive.

PEARL

Yes, it's only perlite to put on ouah best to meet the husband.

GRANNY

I dresses fer none but de chile. [*She goes slowly out at left.*]

PEARL

[*Calling.*] Betteh lay down fust, they won't be here for two hour yet. I'll be there pres'n'ly.

[*She continues to bestir herself about the room and then starts to follow GRANNY. There is a faint tap at the door at right. PEARL stops and listens. The tapping is repeated. She goes and opens the door. A young woman, looking much like PEARL and of about the same age, but gaudily dressed and carrying a baby, stands in the doorway.*]

PEARL

[*With a half-smothered exclamation.*] Sapphie!
[*SAPPHIE motions her to be silent and softly, fearfully enters the room.*]

SAPPHIE

[*In a low voice.*] Wheah Granny Maumee?

PEARL

She in the baid-room fixin' up. Wheah's youah husband?

SAPPHIE

[*After a pause.*] He—didn'—come—

PEARL

Oh, that's too bad, but it's good to see you, and let's see the baby.

SAPPHE

[*Drawing back with the swathed and veiled child.*] Not yet.

PEARL

Oh, he's asleep, of course.

SAPPHE

[*Pointing to doorway through which GRANNY passed.*] Shut the door.

PEARL

[*Obeying wonderingly.*] Well, hit do look good to see you ergin, Sapphie. Hit don't seem like er yeah now sence you lef' home. Does youah husband tek you to pictuh shows?

SAPPHE

Puhl, what's Granny Maumee like now, is she failed any? Is she fie'ce as eveh 'bout the burnin' and the w'ite mens?

PEARL

Why, of course she is. She don't neveh change f'um year ter year. Come on, let's see baby. What youah husband's name? You nevah sent us wu'd what youah new name was.

SAPPHIE

That's what I want to see you for before
Granny Maumee comes out. Come here. [*She
lifts a veil from the child's face.*]

PEARL

[*Peering eagerly forward and then starting
back.*] W'ite!

SAPPHIE

[*Breathlessly.*] How'll she take hit? What'll
she do? I'm scared of her.

PEARL

A light-head merlatter! So youah husband
didn't come 'cause they ain't no husband.
Who's the man?

SAPPHIE

You know wheah I work.

PEARL

Lightfoot!

SAPPHIE

He des would have his way.

PEARL

So, he took you off to town with him, did he,
and that's how come you have the luck to go.
I praise King Jesus he kept me f'um such luck.

SAPPHIE

How'll she take hit?

PEARL

Take hit! Does you spose we can take'n tell her? Thank my Makeh she's blind. It's the mussy of Gawd her eyes was swiveled in w'ite man's fire before she see the w'ite man mix with her blood. You—

SAPPHIE

Oh, I don't care what you calls me if you'll only help me and keep Granny Maumee off'n me and baby.

PEARL

It's only helpin' to keep us all from 'struction that I'll keep it from her.

SAPPHIE

What you think she'd do if she found out?

PEARL

I don't know. Sometimes when her mine runs on 'bout the burnin' she begins to go back'ards.

SAPPHIE

[*Fearfully.*] What you mean?

PEARL

You knows what I means. Away from the love of Gawd, back to that Affykin devil stuff.

SAPPHIE

[*Starting with a cry toward the door at back.*]
Oh, she might witch me and the baby too.

PEARL

Don't be scared. She won't tech you 'cause she won't know the sinneh you been.

SAPPHIE

He des would have his way. [*A tap is heard outside GRANNY'S door.*]

PEARL

She's comin'.

[*SAPPHIE shrinks back toward opposite side of room as door opens and GRANNY enters wearing a red dress with red apron and red silk cap on her head. She pauses just inside and listens intently.*]

GRANNY

Who bin talkin'?

PEARL

Me. [*She guides GRANNY to her chair.*]

GRANNY

Well, talk on. How I look? [*She straightens proudly in her chair.*]

PEARL

Good. The red ain't faded none.

GRANNY

Dat's good, fer I needs hit bright dis day an' night. De babe'll wan' tuh see hit. Red's de fus' coloh er baby notice an' red allers goes wif black. Red neveh go wif w'ite. Looks ghas'ly. I use allers tuh wrop my Sam in red—*[She pauses and her voice grows shriller.]* an' red's de las' way I seen 'im.

PEARL

Now, Granny—

GRANNY

Dat's right, I mus' tek my mine off er dat sight now. But I'll tek'n' wrop dis noo black babe in my red ap'un dat hilt my Sam. In red he shill be wrop an' black he shill shine. Royal black we is an' royal black we shill stay. Praise my Makeh, dey ain' no drop er any yutheh coloh in 'im. All us wimens wuz hones', all de way down, an' we kep' clean er de w'ite streak. We kep' us clean, praise my King, an' we will ter de een'. W'ite blood were 'stroyin' angel tuh my fambly f'um de beginnin's, but hit neveh yit mix wif us. We wuz save f'um dat las' pizen.

[SAPPHE turns as though to go out through the door at right with her child. PEARL motions her through side doorway at left. She goes out softly.]

PEARL

Hattie Lee she uz hones' an' her baby's w'ite. That w'ite man tuk'n marry her with preacheh.

GRANNY

Married wif preacheh! Do dat change de trashy blood? I wudn' have dat kinder mud pumpin' in er babe er my blood, not ef de sevumty eldehs had j'ined a w'ite man tuh you er Sapphie.

PEARL

W'ite blood no wus'n black blood.

GRANNY

'Tis fer us! 'Tis fer dis house er sorrer. Hit's bin fieh, hit's bin death, hit's bin de crawlin' stream er hell fer me an' my fambly as fur as I knows, an' dat's a hunderd yeah. But I lets all de yutheh go, 'ca'se I hates um ernuff fer dis one thing—

[She goes to red-covered chest at right, lifts the lid and takes out two half-charred sticks of wood.]

PEARL

Now, Granny, put um back—

GRANNY

[*Waving the sticks.*] Deze, w'ut I snatch f'um de fieh undeh Sam. Deze is ernuff to mek us hate all er dat blood an' keep hit fur f'um us.

PEARL

[*Going to her and taking the sticks.*] Is this heah makin' ready for comp'ny? Now ca'm yo'se'f.
[*She lays the sticks on top of the chest.*]

GRANNY

[*Seating herself and growing suddenly very still as though listening.*] Yo're right. Time's up, de houah is heah an' de chile is neah. I feels hit. Run an' open de do'. Sapphie mus' be comin' up de paf. Mek ready. I feel my noo man chile neah me.

[PEARL goes out doorway at left. After a moment she and SAPPHIE enter without the baby.
GRANNY stands up.]

SAPPHIE

[*Going forward hesitatingly to GRANNY.*]
Granny Maumee.

GRANNY

Give 'im heah in deze ahms.

SAPPHIE

I lay him in yutheh room. I want to see you.

GRANNY

Fetch 'im.

SAPPHIE

Aint you glad to have me back?

GRANNY

Fetch de babe, be swif! [PEARL *motions to Sapphie; she goes out to get the baby.*]

PEARL

Her man, he couldn't come with her.

GRANNY

No diffunce. I bless de man an' wish 'im well, he's su'ved his puhpose, but he ain' none er ouah blood. De boy babe's de chief un. [SAPPHIE *enters with the baby.*] Give 'im heah, be swif'.

[SAPPHIE *hesitatingly lays the child in GRANNY'S outstretched arms. As she does so a strange reaction, like an electrical shock, seems to overtake the old woman. She holds out the child as though she would give it back. After a moment, however, she presses it to her breast, rocking back and forth and crooning to it.*]

Babe, man babe-um, er noo man, er puore-blood man raise' up atter all dem gals. Sam kin res' now. 'Caze w'y—*[She begins to chant.]* 'caze er noo man bin raise up an' he shill lay hol' er de stahs an' th'ow um down fer vingince. He shill be er 'stroyin' fieh er heavum tuh roll ergin de hell fieh w'ut dey lit fer Sam an' quinch hit out fuheveh. De wrath er Gawd shill be wif 'im an' de w'ite blood shill puhvail no more ergin 'im. De sun an' moon shill rise no mo' on my house an' fin' on'y gals, 'caze we got er puore-blood man fer to gyard an' carry us on.

[From time to time during her words she has paused and bent intently over the baby, striving to see it.]

An' my King'll not keep de cuss on me now an' leave me go down to de grave wifouten sight er you, my babe-um. Dese eyes shill yit behole. *[She rises with the child in her arms.]* Go on out er heah, Puhl an' Sapphie, lemme be alone now wif my babe. *[She waves them out imperiously.]*

PEARL

Whuffo'?

GRANNY

I wan's ter see dis chile befo' I dies.

PEARL

Why, Granny Maumee, your eyes is swiveled up with the fire. You couldn't see.

GRANNY

Go. I won' be long.

PEARL

[To SAPPHE.] Come on, don't cross her.

SAPPHE

[Whispering.] I'm 'fraid—

PEARL

You know she couldn't—[*They go out doorway at left.*]

[GRANNY stands staring down at the child in her arms for some time. She then goes over to the bed and lays the child upon it, bending over it and striving to see. At last she turns, goes swiftly over to the red-covered chest and taking from its top the two charred sticks, turns, lights them at the fireplace, comes forward to the middle of the room and holding the flaming faggots before her face peers steadily at them.]

GRANNY

[*Suddenly in a loud voice with upraised face.*]

Sam—ask Gawd tuh give back my sight dis night er all nights an' leave me look at de noo

man w'ut bin handed down ter us. Fer we kep' de blood puore. Ask an' we shill receive—*[In a still louder tone, stretching upward her hands.]* Lawd, I believe.

[She suddenly sways, turns, drops the sticks on the hearth, puts her hands before her eyes and staggers forward. After a moment she takes her hands from her face and looks tremblingly about.]

Yes—he give hit back—I sees—Oh, my black babe!

[She moves swiftly to the bed and bends over the child. There is a moment's pause.]

W'ut dis? Cain' I see yit? De wrong coloh.

[She turns swiftly, seizes a white cloth from a chair and a black one from another, holds them up and looks at them alternately.]

W'ite—black.

[Then turning to the bed she stares again at the child. After a moment she straightens and reaching her hands upward she gives a cry.]

W'ite! Debbils!

[SAPPHIE and PEARL appear in doorway. GRANNY bends over the child with clawlike fingers raised as though she were about to strangle it. SAPPHE darts forward and

snatches the child. GRANNY turns and looks at SAPPHIE and PEARL in turn.]

PEARL

She sees!

SAPPHIE

Granny Maumee, the babe'll be ouah'n an' we can raise him right. He's a good baby and don't cry none. I don't want live'n town. I want to live here with you and Puhl. Baby'll love you. And we won't be no trouble to keep 'caze I got money. Look—take this.

[She draws from her bosom a crumpled handful of bills which she stuffs into GRANNY'S hands.]

GRANNY

Wheah you git dis? *[She stands immovably staring before her.]*

SAPPHIE

He give it to me.

GRANNY

[Shaking off the money onto the table.] W'ite man money.

SAPPHIE

He des would have his way, but he's good to me and he takes care of me. He's comin' heah to-night to see me.

GRANNY

W'ut de name?

SAPPHIE

Young Lightfoot.

GRANNY

De gran'pap er dat man tetch off de fieh w'ut
bu'n up my Sam.

SAPPHIE

But this'n ain't that away, Granny Maumee.
He's always kind.

GRANNY

W'en's de man comin'?

SAPPHIE

He'll be here soon and if you'll only listen
he'll sure talk you round.

GRANNY

[*Pointing to the baby.*] Hit wants out. Take
it out an' come yer.

[*SAPPHIE obeys, going through doorway at left.*

*GRANNY suddenly turns to the flower-basin
mounted on a tripod. Seizing it she empties
both flowers and earth in the fireplace,
where she refills the basin with live coals.
Then bringing it forward she replaces it upon
its tripod.*]

PEARL

Granny Maumee, you're slippin' backwuds, please don't fuss with that conju'n foolishness, they ain't nuthin' into hit an' hit des keeps you 'cited.

GRANNY

Debbils calls out debbils.

[She goes to several places where upon the walls are hung bunches of dried herbs. From several of these she seizes handfuls.]

Come, my seedin' Jimson, come, ole Rattlesnake-Marsteh, come, my Black-Ball, w'ut Pap Jack han' me up.

[SAPPHIE reënters the room and stands watching GRANNY in terror. GRANNY closes all the doors to the room, then going to the red-covered chest on the right and opening it she drags forth several coils of blackened iron chain which she casts upon the table. She sprinkles a few of her handful of herbs on the fire in the brazier. A dense smoke arises.]

SAPPHIE

[With a scream.] Don't! Oh, don't conjuh me.

PEARL

[Scornfully.] Don't fuss, Sapphie, she won't do no harm. What the chains for, Granny?

GRANNY

Dem's de chains w'ut bine Sam w'en dey tuk'n bu'n 'im.

PEARL

What you worry yourself by gittin' um out for?

GRANNY

I ain' worried no mo'. [*She throws more herbs on the fire in the brazier.*] Dem chains fer de w'ite man.

PEARL

What you mean?

GRANNY

[*Pointing to the door at left back.*] W'en de w'ite man knock de do' shill be open an' dat shill be de beginnin' er his trials.

PEARL

What you mean?

GRANNY

De smoke in dis room will strankle de man's will in his breas' an' I'll use 'im den as I choose.

SAPPHIE

What you goin' do to 'im?

GRANNY

I goin' lead 'im out tuh de i'un hitchin' pos' w'ut dey fas'en Sam ter an' I goin' tuh chain

'im da wif dese chains an' I goin' tuh bring 'im tuh 'imself an' den I goin' tuh bu'n 'im lak he gran'pappy bu'n Sam.

SAPPHIE

[*With a scream.*] You shan't.

PEARL

You spose we leave you do hit?

[*The girls start forward toward the doorway at left back. As they near GRANNY she swiftly seizes a handful of burning herbs from the brazier and waves them smoking across the faces of the girls under their nostrils, so that they breathe the fumes. They take a few steps farther, staggering, and then stand motionless and silent. She takes them by the hands and leads them back. The fumes of stramonium, solanum and other herbs have produced catalepsia. GRANNY goes to the fireplace at back and from the mantel takes a wooden bowl, a short stick and a large dry gourd. She returns, gives the bowl and stick to SAPPHIE, causing her to beat rhythmically on the inverted bowl with the stick, a motion which SAPPHIE continues in imitative hypnosis. GRANNY gives the gourd to PEARL, causing her to shake it. The gourd gives forth a dry rattle from seeds or pebbles within it. GRANNY*

then places the two girls on either side of the tripod and they continue their drumming and rattling rhythmically. She then takes her place back of the tripod and casts more herbs upon the fire.]

GRANNY

Sistehs, kin yo' heah me speak? Answeh, Sapphie.

SAPPHIE

[In a dull tone.] Yes.

GRANNY

Answeh, Puhl. Does yo' heah me?

PEARL

[Also dully.] Yes.

GRANNY

Does yo' see?

BOTH GIRLS

Yes.

GRANNY

Den watch me mek my w'ite man Lightfoot outer Lightfoot money.

[She seizes the bunch of bills from the table and plucking strands of hair from her head she begins tying the money together; taking the candle from the table she holds it over the tri-

pod until it is soft and then kneads it with the money until the whole grows into the rude semblance of a human figure. Stooping then to the hearth she takes up the two charred sticks of her son's pyre and with one of these she stabs the wax mannikin through the breast. Holding up the impaled figure she stands over her tripod and again speaks:]

Say dis atter me:—

By de fieh at night, by de black boy down,

THE SISTERS

“By the fire at night, by the black boy down,”

GRANNY

By de skunt-off face an' de red on de groun',

[The sisters repeat each line after her in unison, keeping up their rhythm with drum and rattle.]

By de w'ip an' de rope an' de chain dat swung,

By de bloody mouf an' de bit-off tongue,

By de eat-up heaft an' de spit-out gall,

We scream, we beg, we whoop, we squall

Tuh git poweh, tuh git stren'th tuh put de trick
on um all.

[After this the remainder of GRANNY'S curse is spoken by her alone. The sisters continue their sounds with the drum and rattle.]

Let um git no res' in bed, er good at vittals, er
hope at wu'k, er he'p at home, er peace wif fren's
er kin, er tryin' tuh tek pleasuah, er in any place
dey kin go er hide.

Th'ee finge Jack my Obi pap,
He'p me, ole Marsteh.
Keep de promise wif um all.

*[She lifts the mannikin on the stick and looks
at it.]*

Now, my Lightfoot, yore tu'n's come.
Dis is Lightfoot, Ole Marsteh.

Let me slit 'im an' bu'n 'im an' was'e 'im an' cut
'im an' choke an' weah 'im an' teah 'im as Sam
'uz slit an' choked an' bu'nt an' was'e an' cut
an' woah an' toah.

*[She waves the mannikin to the four points of
the compass.]*

Fo' times fo' times fo' times fo',
Fly an' call an' open de do'.

De chains is ready, de man is neah, an' almos'
heah an' de chahm shill hol'.

Spile 'im as I spile 'im.

*[She casts the mannikin and the sticks with
ferocity into the fire on the tripod and then
bends down staring intently into the fire.]*

There is a moment's silence and then she gives a cry, as she looks into the fire.]

Sam! Is dat you in da? You instid er he? W'ut dis? Is we bin trick? 'Tain't you—'tis you—Sam! Ah-h!

[With a cry she snatches the blazing mannikin from the brazier and folds it in her caught-up apron, staggering and beating the air as though battling with unseen forces. Suddenly a gust of wind blows open the door at the right and a breeze fills the room, blowing the smoke and fluttering the garments of the women. The drum and rattle cease and fall to the floor. Immediately Granny raises her face in awe, seeing a vision. She stretches out her arms toward it, speaking brokenly.]

Sam! Yes, I sees yo'. I heahs yo'. Yes, my Babe-um.—Talk on.—Tell me.—W'at!

[She pauses, listening intently, with eyes fixed on the unseen.]

Leave 'im go!—Oh, how kin I?—Gi' me stren'th.

[She pauses again and bows her head. After a moment she again raises her face to the vision.]

I knows.—I fuhgot. I'll do hit.—I des wen' backerds but I'm wif yo' now.—Yas—Ez we

fuhgives uthehs—yas—I knows—we'll do hit.—
We will be tuhgetheh.—Ez we fuhgives uthehs.

[A knocking is heard on the door back, at left of the fireplace. GRANNY turns her head and listens. After a pause the knocking begins again more imperatively. She turns, seizes the tripod brazier, casts it into the fireplace, and staggers toward the door, taking her stand beside it. The knocking pauses.]

Go back, w'ite man. Roll back, w'ite wave er de fiery lek. Once you lit de fieh an' bu'n me. Once you po' de blood an' pizen me, but dis time Sam an' me we's de stronges' an' we leaves you go, we leaves you live tuh mek yore peace wif Gawd. We're puore bloods heah, royal black—all but one an' we'll do de bes' we kin erbout 'im. He shill be name Sam. Go back, w'ite man, an' sin no mo'.

[She pauses and listens. There is no further sound from without. GRANNY staggers over to the sisters and shakes them, saying in a faint voice:]

Wake up, Sapphie; come tuh, Puhl. *[As she does so she looks upward again and cries out:]* Sam, we done hit, an' we stays tuhgetheh!

[She sinks down slowly to the floor. The sisters have stirred and looked about stupidly.]

PEARL now sees GRANNY and bends over her.]

PEARL

[*With a cry.*] Ah—Granny Maumee's dead.

[*She runs terror-stricken to the door at back, crouching beside it. SAPPHE then, after gazing intently at GRANNY, suddenly runs toward the door and dragging it open rushes out, followed by her sister.*]

BOTH GIRLS

[*Outside.*] Granny Maumee's dead! Granny Maumee's dead!

[*Their voices gradually die away in the distance, the door blows shut. The body of GRANNY MAUMEE is left alone in the room.*]

CURTAIN.

THE RIDER OF DREAMS

THE RIDER OF DREAMS

SCENE: *Night in a room used for kitchen, dining-room and laundry by a colored family. A lamp is set upon a central table laid with a spotless table cloth. Baskets of clothes stand on several chairs. At the back is a cook-stove and to the left of this a door. There are also doorways at the right and left of the room. LUCY SPARROW, a worn, sweet-faced woman of forty, is sprinkling clothes at an ironing-board at left with her back turned to the table beside which, on a high stool, is perched a small boy, BOOKER SPARROW. Both the boy and the woman as well as the room show a painstaking neatness despite the disorder necessary in the process of a professional "wash."*

LUCY

Who make you?

BOOKER

God. Ain't the mush done now?

LUCY

It's done but I ain't done wif you. You got

to learn good befo' you can eat good. Who redeem you?

BOOKER

Christ. I'll stop being hungry for it if I don't get it now.

LUCY

Bettah lose youah wishes an' youah ahms an' laigs an' everything youah body's fix wif an' keep youah immortal soul. Who sanctify you?

BOOKER

The Holy Ghost. I don't want nothing but mush.

LUCY

Well, you ain' goin' to git hit twell you luhns de questions. What de chief en' of man?

BOOKER

Chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy himself for ever.

LUCY

[Coming swiftly forward and confronting him with a threatening look:] Enjoy hisself! I ain' neveh teach you dat. You know betteh'n dat. Man got no right to enjoy hisself. He got to enjoy Gawd. You knows dat as well as you knows eatin'. An' you got to say it an' what's

mo' you got to live it. Now what de chief en' of man?

BOOKER

Enjoy God forever.

LUCY

Dat's mo' like it. [*She turns her back and going to the ironing-board resumes her labours, still talking.*] I'm raisin' you fo' de Kingdom an' you'ah goin' in de Kingdom ef pushin' 'll lan' you dere. Because dis time anutheh yeah you may be in some lonesome graveyard. [*Singing:*]

In some lonesome graveyard,
Oh, Lawd, no time to pray.

[*As she sings BOOKER stealthily slips off his stool and going around to the opposite side of the table takes a spoon with which he approaches a dish set upon a warming-shelf fixed to the stove. He furtively dips his spoon in the dish and begins to eat. LUCY continuing her singing.*]

Play on youah harp, little David,
Little Davy, how ole are you?
"I'm only twelve yeahs ole."

[*She turns and discovers BOOKER.*] What! You stealin'! I'll show you! [*She gives him a cuff and a shake, depositing him again upon his stool.*] You shorely is on de way to de fieh but I'm goin' pluck you out ef it skins you alive. Steal, will you? What de sevenf commandment?

BOOKER

[*Sniveling.*] Thou shalt not steal.

LUCY

See dat. You knows it but you des won't live hit. Well, I'm goin' live it into you. I'm goin' slap sin out of you. [*She gives him another shake.*] An' de grace into you. Now you say dat commandment sevumty times sevun. Begin. Say hit.

BOOKER

Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not steal—
[*The door at back opens and MADISON SPARROW stands in the doorway looking on the scene within the room. He is a tall, loose-jointed, lazy-looking man. In one hand he carries a long green bag.*]

MADISON

[*After a survey of the situation.*] What de boy do?

LUCY

He steal, dat what he do.

MADISON

Um. What he steal?

LUCY

Mush. I tole him not to tech it.

MADISON

Well, he was hongry, weren't he?

LUCY

Dat ain' de p'int.. Tweren't his till I give it to him.

MADISON

[Places the bag carefully by the doorway, throws his hat upon it, then seats himself at the table.] Bring on dat mush. I'm tia'hd of dese fool doin's. Dey ain't no git ahead wif um. Ef de boy wants mush let him git mush.

LUCY

[Placing food before him on the table.] Yes, but not rob it.

MADISON

Who talkin' 'bout robbin'?

LUCY

Madison, dat's de wrong kin' of trash fo' dis

baby to heah. Go lay down, honey. Tek de bowl wif you.

[BOOKER whines but takes a dish and goes to doorway at Left.]

MADISON

No, hit's de right kin' of preachin'. I'm tia'hd of all dat ol' fashion way of doin'. Ef I wuz to wuk my ahms off dat ol' fashion way I couldn't git no funder.

LUCY

What you bin wukin' at dis yeah, Madison?

MADISON

Dat's it. You know dat I'm bin lookin' fo' it and couldn't find hit.

LUCY

What you wuk at last yeah?

MADISON

You knows I wuk in de strippin' factory.

LUCY

Jes' two weeks.

MADISON

You knows I wuk till I strain my back. But neveh min' about all dat. I done tuhn oveh a

new leaf. I goin' to be a business man. I goin' to let de otheh man wuk.

LUCY

'Sposin' everybody was to do dat away.

MADISON

Let 'em do hit. I don' ask nothin' of nobody. I goin' to have every toof in my haid covehed wif gol'. I'll get youah'n an' Book's fix dat way too. I goin' to have plenty society grub in me all de time. I ain' goin' to let my fam'ly suffeh. I got too sweet a disposishun fo' dat. I'll git 'em whateveh I want.

BOOKER

[*Lingering in doorway.*] When you get rich will you get you the guitar, Daddy?

[*LUCY waves BOOKER through doorway. He vanishes.*]

MADISON

I'll git it an' I got it. Watch me now. [*He goes over to the bag by the door and reaching in it produces a handsome guitar.*] Dat's de beginnin' er good times, boy.

LUCY

[*With sickening apprehension.*] Madison, where you git dat insterment?

MADISON

Dats' de Lawd's insterment, Lucy. He done pervide it.

LUCY

Oh, Madison, dat ain' youah'n.

MADISON

'Tis now, honey.

LUCY

No, youah las' dime you spent Sunday an' I ain' give you no money since. You got it wifout payin' for it. You charged it.

MADISON

Yassah, I got it wifout payin' for it an' I goin' to keep on a-gittin' it wifout payin' for hit as long as de gittin's good.

LUCY

How you like to be treat dat way?

MADISON

What way?

LUCY

If you was keepin' a store, to have folks charge things when dey didn' know how dey could pay.

MADISON

I'm willin' fo' to be treat dat way ef dey can

do hit. Let 'em come an' git my things if dey finds any.

LUCY

[*Breaking down.*] Oh, I cain' stan' hit. Youah sinkin' fas' down to de fiery lake an' you's pullin' my Baby down too.

MADISON

No, I's raisin' him up an' I goin' to lan' us all in a sof' place on 'dat Easy Street I heah em singin' 'bout so long wifout seein'.

LUCY

[*Suddenly examining the guitar.*] Wheah you git dis guitar?

MADISON

What guitar?

LUCY

Dis. Oh, Madison, dis is 'Zek'l Williams' own guitar dat he wouldn' sell. Dis is de guitar dat nobody couldn' buy. How you come by it?

MADISON

Look heah, woman. You act like I *stole* de guitar. You don't think I'm a thief, do you?

LUCY

How you come by hit?

MADISON

I got it off Wilson Byrd.

LUCY

Dat sneakin' w'ite man. How'd he git it?

MADISON

I didn' ask him.

LUCY

What you give him fo' hit?

MADISON

Oh, dat's anotheh story. Him an' me's goin' in business togetheh.

LUCY

Oh, Madison, dat w'ite man stole dis guitar. Oh, take it back dis minute an' snatch youah soul from de bu'nin'.

MADISON

Who, me? What you tak me fo', gal? Take back a guitar to de rich man, de man what own de very house we live in!

LUCY

Well, we soon will buy hit.

MADISON

Dat's right. We will. But dat ain' de question. I didn' git dis guitar fo' to return it, I git

it fo' to play it. I boun' to play it cause I'm goin' to be er rich man soon an' I got to have a plenty music in me.

LUCY

You goin' to git rich playin' guitar?

MADISON

[*Laughing comfortably.*] Eh, yah, yah. Whoopee! No indeedy. I flies higher dan music flies. I'm one er dese heah kine er 'lectioneerin' mens which make dere money work fo' um. Dey sen's one dollah out in de heat an' sweats her twell she rolls home wif anutheh.

LUCY

How you goin' to put money out, Madison, lessen you wuks an' gits de money?

MADISON

[*Cunningly.*] Oh, don' yo' botheh youah haid long er dat. I bin down low and folks trample me des same as a wu'm, but now I'm goin' spread my wings an' sting 'em like a king bee. Whaffo' I lay dere an' let'm trample me? 'Twere because I lack confarence. I puts my 'pen'ance on dis promis', I puts my 'pen'ance on dat, an' dey all fails me.

LUCY

You ain't neveh put youah trus' in Gawd.

MADISON

Yassuh, I did, an' Gawd He up an' gimme de go-by too. What He bin doin' fo' me? Nuthin'. Now I goin' spit on my han's an' wu'l in an' trus' myse'f. An' I feels lots betteh. I can feel conferdence wukin' all oveh me. I casts 'em all off. I'm lookin' out fo' myse'f. M-m-m—It took me long time to git heah but now I'm heah let 'em look out for me. [*His voice rises to a chant.*]

M—m—m—Midnight on de sea. All de lights out. I'm carryin' hod on Jacob' laddeh to build me a new house an' I'm buildin it high, man. Don' tech me. I'm a flame of fieh an' I'll singe you sho'. If dey asks fo' me tell 'em say, "I saw somethin' sailin' up but he was headin' fo' a high hill on de sun an' my eyes failed me." Tell 'em say, "He had de fo' win's runnin' like stallions to fetch up wif him but dey carried 'em out, an' buried 'em in de valley. He bus' dere hea'ts!" Tell 'em say, "He was herdin' lightnin's like sheep an' dey wuz too slow an' he picked 'em up an' sheared 'em an' sent 'em home."

Dat's me, I'm de one you'll be talkin' bout.

Fer why? 'Cause I cas' off ever'thing an' I puts my trus' in myself an' nuthin' can't hole me. De mo' I says it de mo' I feels conference. I feels it a wukin'.

LUCY

You goin' to wuk, Madison?

MADISON

Yes, indeedy. I got to wuk an' wuk ha'd. I can't shirk none.

LUCY

What wuk you goin' to do?

MADISON

I'm a stock brokin' man. I goin' into de stock brokin' business tomorrer.

LUCY

How?

MADISON

Buyin' an' sellin', dat's how an' which too.

LUCY

De Devil's wrastlin' wif you, Madison, an' you's perishin' fas'. Ef you keeps on in dis paf you'll lan' mongs' de rocks er mournin'. You's let somebody tu'n you roun'.

MADISON

Not me. Nobody can't tu'n me roun'. I dreamed it an' I dreamed it right, face fo'mos' an' on de run.

LUCY

How dream?

MADISON

Las' night an' day befo' yistiddy night an' night befo' dat. I wuz layin' groanin', "O Lawd, how long," an' I heah a voice say, "Git up an' come a-runnin'." Looks up an' sees a fine w'ite saddle hoss. Hoss say,

"Ride me right an' I'll guide you right."

On I gits an' off he goes, slick as a rancid transom car. Comes to high hill lookin' down on de sun an' moon. Hoss stop an' say,

"Brung you heah to give you noos

De worl' is youahn to pick an' choose."

I ax him "How dat?" Hoss say:

"How is how an' why is why,

Buy low an' sell high."

I say to him, "I got no money to buy. Wheah I goin' git de fun's to buy low?" Hoss respon':

"Trus' yo'se'f an' take youah own,

Git de meat an' leave de bone,

Bus' de nut an' fling em de shell,
Ride an' let em walk a spell,
Findeh's keepek's, losek's weepk's,
I hope dese few lines find you well."

I ax him who tole him all dis an' hoss say:

"Ole hoss *Grab* will nevah balk,
All dis heah is w'ite man talk."

Dat what de hoss say to me in my true dream
ev'y night dis week an' I'm a-goin' to bide by
hit twell de las' er pea time. 'Cause I'm er true
dreameh an' my mammy she wuz befo' me.

LUCY

What come of de hoss in de dream, Madison?

MADISON

Dat's all. Hoss went up in smoke an' I come
down in bed.

LUCY

Hoss went up in smoke! No, hit went down
in smoke an' fiah.

MADISON

Now look-a heah, woman. I'm goin' to make
you a good livin' f'um now on. I'm goin' into
business termorrer. I'm goin' in de specalatin'
wu'k. I'm goin' to buy low an' sell high.

LUCY

What kin you buy wif? You got no money.

MADISON

[*Hesitating but collecting his forces gradually.*]

Oh, ain't I tell you 'bout dat? I got it in de dream.

LUCY

In de dream?

MADISON

Um Hmmm. You know dat hoss I tole you 'bout. Well'm, jes' fo' we pa'ted he prance up th'ough a starry fiel' an' come to a gyarden fence. Oveh dat fence he lep an', man, she was a fine gyarden. "Whose patch dish yer?" I say to him. Hoss say:

"If you asks me grab what you see."

Den he reaches down an' pulls up a tu'nip wif his teef an' gives it to me an' say,

"Dis gyarden truck will fetch you luck."

[*He watches LUCY furtively.*] An' I takes an' sta'ts to peel dis tu'nip an' what does I find? I finds she's a fine fat roll er bills, dem tu'nip tops is greenbacks.

LUCY

So youah money is dream money?

MADISON

Well, no, not ezackly. De hoss wispeh sumpin in my eah an' told me how to make dat dream money real money. An' I took de hint an' done it today. An' on dat money I'll buy low an' gouge 'em all good.

LUCY

How much you got?

MADISON

Well'm—*[He hesitates.]* I got a little an' den some. I got erbout—fifty er so.

LUCY

Wheah you git it? *[She catches hold of him.]*

MADISON

Tu'n me loose, woman. I goin' to baid. I got to make early sta't. *[He pulls off his coat.]*

LUCY

[Wildly.] I ain' goin' to let you stay in sin. *[She snatches the coat from him.]* I goin' take dis money an' make you say wheah you got it.

[She begins hastily searching through the pockets of the coat.]

MADISON

[Calmly regarding her with great good humour and breaking into a laugh as she fails in her search.] Eh, yah, yah, sea'ch an' look, sea'ch an' look.

LUCY

Oh, Madison, ain' yo' got no honin' ter be hones' at all?

MADISON

Hones'! What kin' er fool talk is dat? I done got my ear-string bus' now an' dem preachah wu'ds can't fool me no mo'. You'll neveh fin' it, honey. 'Cause why? 'Cause I'm got it in my pants an' I goin' to keep it f'um a foolish woman.

LUCY

[Running to him desperately.] You got to give it to me.

MADISON

Gal, ef you don' tu'n me loose I'll git ugly. Now, look heah. I wants to heah de las' er dis. I got new ideahs. I got big plots en plans. I done give you de plankses in my flatfo'm an' I'm a-goin' to stan' on hit. When I makes a lot mo' money in de broker business 'Im a-goin' to give you all de gold youah ap'un'll hold, ev'y day er youah life, an' you won' have to wait long.

But till dat day an' to dat time I'm de treasu'eh
er dis lodge an' I'm de stake holdeh er dis race
an' dat money stays in de pu'se in de hip er my
ol' jeanses.

[He says this last slowly and with growing emphasis and as he ends, gives himself a resounding thwack on the hip over his pocket. There is a moment's pause. He puts his hand hurriedly in the pocket and then dazedly into one on the other hip.]

What dis? Wheah dat roll?

LUCY

[Fearfully.] I ain' tech it. You know I ain'
bin neah you.

MADISON

[Rushing to her.] Gimme de coat.

[He snatches the coat and begins going through the pockets, from time to time searching and slapping the garments he is wearing.]

Didn't you git it? You mus' er tuk it.

LUCY

No, Madison, I ain' see nor tech it. You
watched me.

MADISON

Oh, Lawd, he'p me look.

[He begins to run around the room, looking on the table, picking up articles and letting them fall, dropping on his knees and hunting under the table and chairs. As he searches he grows more frantic.]

Oh, my Lawd, Oh, wheah is it? I got to have it. Oh, I couldn' lose it, hit ain' mine ter lose. Stay by me, Lucy, an' he'p me fin' it, git down on youah knees, Lucy. Oh, wheah did I drop it? I'm gittin' old an' needs it. Ef I lose dis I lose all my push. I was jes' goin' into business an' we all wuz goin' to fly high. I got to fin' it. I ain' give up. Lemme think. Oh, I hopes some hones' puhson foun' it. Lemme come on down—Know I put it on dat side 'cause dat de side Mistah Long he wuz on—Oh, I'll go crazy—*[He strikes his forehead groaning.]*

LUCY

[Starting.] Mistah Long! He's cashiah in de Dime Savin's! How he give you money?

MADISON

Oh, lemme see—he gimme de money an' I put it right in yere. *[He fumbles again distractedly in his pocket.]*

LUCY

[*Pursuing him desperately.*] Onliest money at de Dime Savin's is *de* money. You couldn't draw *hit* out. You didn' do dat,—you couldn'—Tell me if you did fo' I'll fin' it out tomorrer—Oh, tell me true—you couldn' when it's in my name—tell me now fo' I'll find it out.

MADISON

Oh, I can't stand it.

LUCY

Ef you wan' me to he'p you den be free wif me. How you draw money from de Bank? I give you no papeh. You *couldn'* draw *de* money.

MADISON

Wilson Byrd, he gimme de papeh.

LUCY

I give him no papeh.

MADISON

He write it fo' you.

LUCY

Oh, Gawd, dat w'ite man write my name. You drawed de money—I see it now. You had dealin's wif a fo'geh, Wilson Byrd.

MADISON

Spar' me an' he'p me. He tol' me ef I draw de money he'd take me into business wif him an' gimme de guitar besides.

LUCY

Did you spar' me? Fifty dollahs! You said fifty, didn' you? How could you do hit? More'n six months' ha'd slavin'. Six months mo' befo' I can resto' it back. I could a bought de house tomorrer mo'nin' an' now hit's six months off to pay in dat fifty. It *was* fifty, didn' you say? Maybe 'twuzn' dat much. Tell me right. I'll fin' it out tomorrer.

MADISON

Dis yere'll kill me ef I can't think.

LUCY

How much you draw? Tell me right. Look at me. Were hit fifty? [*She holds his eye.*] Less? Mo'? How much? [*She continues to hold his lustreless eyes, reading them.*] A hunde'd? Two hunde'd? Eight hunde'd? [*A pause ensues as she reads the truth in his face.*] All of hit! [*She sinks in a chair.*] Twelve yeahs' labour sence I married you an' termorrer I wuz goin' to mek de payment an' we'd a bin undeh owah own roof. I'm done. I could a paid off pa't,

mebbe fifty, but I won' las' twelve yeahs mo' at de same thing. But I thank Thee, Lawd, dat it wuz stole f'um us all ef hit had to be stole.

MADISON

Ef I could on'y think. Had hit in de bank—felt hit an' had it on Thu'd Street—slapped hit an' had it at Joe's house—slapped hit an' had it comin' up de alley—jes' fo' I clum de hill—lemme see—clum de hill—went in th'oo Wilson Byrd's hedge fence—he gimme de guitar—scrape my back comin' out—[*His face shows gradual recollection, and suddenly brightens.*] I knows now! Dat's hit! In dat white man's yard wheah he gimme de guitar! I wuz jes' goin' to give him de money when somebody grabbed him f'um behin'. He give a squawk an' skeered me. I run out th'oo his hedge fence an' scrape my back. I scrape de pocketbook out. She's dere! In dat Wilson Byrd's yard. I'll git it yit. Watch me. [*He grabs his hat and runs excitedly toward the door.*]

LUCY

[*Rushing toward him.*] No, sumpin' might happen. You might git mix up wif him ergin. Lemme go, but I mus' resto' dis guitar at Uncle Williams, as I go by his house. I'll slip it on his porch. Maybe he'll neveh know it wuz

gone. Oh, if somebody had seen it heah! How could I have stood it?

[She puts on a shawl and takes up the bag but as she lays her hand on the door-knob a loud knock is heard on the door. Both start back and wait. The knocking is repeated. She throws off the shawl, places the bag in a corner and returning to the door, opens it. She greets the visitor in a strained voice, almost with a shriek.]

Uncle Williams! Step in, please.

[A man enters. The newcomer is old, with white hair and beard. He is probably of Moorish descent. He is so small and weakened as to be almost a dwarf, but his whole demeanor indicates great latent power. A strong personality, dominating the two others from the first instant.]

WILLIAMS

Good evenin', Lucy.

[He seems to be unaware of the presence of MADISON. He comes forward with little mincing steps and an old man's gesture, then takes off his hat and sees about him. The others stand watching him, transfixed.]

Ain' you goin' shut de do', Lucy? I feels draf's.

I'm gittin' old an' catches cold easy. Ain' you goin' take my hat? [*She reaches for it mechanically, watching him apprehensively.*] No, de hat—not de stick—ol' pu'son like me always need good stout stick er club case er havin' faintin' spell—sumpin' to lean on. Now, wheah a cheer, bettah fetch me er cheer fo' feah I might set on sumpin' you wouldn' choose fo' me. [*She obeys dumbly and brings a chair to him.*] Set it neareh. Dat's right. Now gimme youah shouldeh an' ease me down. Ah—[*He leans heavily on her and sinks tottering into the chair with a great show of feebleness.*] Now take a cheer yo'se'f. I 'spize to see a lady standin' an' me takin' my res', old ez I is. [*She obeys, watching him with doubt and dread.*] Set it dah, wheah I can see you good. [*MADISON is standing up by the wall, right, gazing at him as though paralyzed with fear.*] Dah now. We kin be ca'm and have a nice talk. Does you know what business I come yere fo' tonight? [*He pauses.*] You does, doesn't you?

LUCY

[*Almost beside herself with nervous tension.*] You—come to see—ef—[*Recovering herself with a mighty effort.*] Oh, yes, you come to look oveh de stove an' see ef you like to buy hit.

WILLIAMS

[*Musingly.*] M-m. Well, I reckon—dat's hit. Yes, dey tells me y'all has a wahmin' stove to sell an' now katydid cease, fros' ain' fur off, an' I needs hit. Is dish yere de one?

LUCY

[*Rising and rushing toward door at side.*] No, not dat. Hit's outside—ef you please to step out.

WILLIAMS

Well'm, I'll take'n look her oveh. [*She hastily lights a candle as he rises and totters in the wrong direction.*]

LUCY

Th'oo heah, th'oo heah. De stove's out in de woodshed. [*She grasps and guides him.*]

WILLIAMS

Ah—well'm. Um hm. I always gives things er good lookin' oveh befo' takin' stock in 'm. You needn' come erlong. I lived so long in dis house befo' you wuz bawn dat I knows my way. Is de stove an easy wood eateh?

LUCY

Yes, yes.

[*She gives him the candle and almost pushes him through doorway at side as she follows him out.*]

MADISON, *who has watched fearfully from a dark corner, darts forward and looks after them, listening. He then runs toward the door at back but hesitates before it and turns as LUCY comes swiftly in from outer room, closing the door softly.*]

MADISON

What he say? Do he know?

LUCY

[*Desperately seizing the bag and pressing it into his hands as she turns him again toward doorway at back.*] Oh, I cain' tell. On'y resto' dis in case he don' know er case he do. Now's de one chance to be hones'.

MADISON

Huh. What erbout dat eight hunderd dollah?

LUCY

I don' know. Trus' Gawd an' be hones'.

MADISON

Huh uh. One of us has got to go look fo' dat money.

LUCY

One of us has got to take back de guitar.

MADISON

I'm goin' fo' de money.

LUCY

Den I'll take dis. [*She takes up the guitar and she and MADISON go toward door at back. Then she halts.*] Oh, Madison, you can do bofe. One of us has got to stay wif Uncle Williams. But take back de guitar first.

MADISON

All right. I'll go. An' I ain't played on dis heah but twice. [*He takes the guitar from her.*]

LUCY

Go now. Can you fin' youah way to his porch in de dahk?

MADISON

Will we find de money? Dat's de p'oblem I wants de answeh fo'.

[*LUCY opens door at back to go out. MADISON is at her side. Both start back. WILLIAMS stands before them in the open doorway.*]

LUCY

[*Haltingly, after a pause.*] How—you like—de stove?

WILLIAMS

[*Entering more vigorously than before.*] Well'm,

befo' we goes any funder we betteh come neareh de real p'int an' question. I didn' come fo' no stove dis night. [MADISON *shrinks back into the shadows.*]

LUCY

[*Slowly.*] Yo'—don'—wan'—

WILLIAMS

No'm. To be sho', I might tek de stove one er dese days, but dat ain' my erran' now. Hit's dis; does you know when we mek de bargum about you buyin' dis heah house?

LUCY

Twelve yeah ago.

WILLIAMS

Gal, you dreamin'! 'Tweren't but las' year. 'Twere de fus' er Octobah las' year an' I say I gives you de refusals fer one yeah. 'Membeh dat?

LUCY

Yassuh.

WILLIAMS

So fur so good. Now does you know what day de month dis is?

LUCY

Fus' er Octobah.

WILLIAMS

Dat's true as preachin'. Well'm, time's up.

LUCY

What you mean?

WILLIAMS

I'm er man er my wuhd. Pay me de money
an' tek de house.

LUCY

Termorrer—

WILLIAMS

No. Termorrer won' do.

LUCY

Why you push me so? Oh, please spar' me
an' wait—wait anutheh day.

WILLIAMS

No, I'm er business man. I kin sell de house
fer mo' money termorrer but I hold's to my
wuhd ter sell it to you. I holds to it an' loses
money, but it falls due dis day an' night an'
I won' stretch it one jump er my hea't.

LUCY

You know—de bank—ain't open—

WILLIAMS

Sign de check fer hit. You kin do dat, cain't you?

LUCY

I—s'pose—I—kin.

WILLIAMS

Den up an' do hit. Heah's er check, all wrote out but de signin'. [*She takes the check he produces.*] An' heah's one er dese fountum pins. [*She takes the pen.*] Octobeh fus'—pay to Zek'l Williams—eight hunderd dollahs. Des write "Lucy Sparrow." [*She mechanically turns to do so.*] Looks easy, sho'. But de law allows hit; dis writin' out money. [*He pauses, then adds impressively.*] Dat is, ef you got de money in de bank. Co'se ef de money ain' dah an' you writes de check fer hit de law puts you in State prism. [*She stops and stares at him.*] [*The pen falls from her hand and the check flutters to the floor.*] What de matteh? You wants de house, don' you? [*Lucy's head sinks.*] An' you got de money, ain' you?

MADISON

Dat's de question. [*He comes forward out of the shadow.*]

WILLIAMS

[*Seemingly observing MADISON for the first time during the evening.*] Why, heighyo, Madison. I bin lookin' fer you dis very evenin'. Whah you bin?

MADISON

Bin home.

WILLIAMS

Sho'ly not, Madison, sho'ly not all evenin'? Has you?

MADISON

Yes.

WILLIAMS

Well, ain' dat de whu'lygig? I wuz lookin' fer you at Pratt's sto' at eight o'clock an' dey say you jes' lef' dah. You wuz dah, weren't you?

MADISON

No, suh.

WILLIAMS

Well, dere I am fool agin. An' who you think done fool me?

MADISON

Dunno.

WILLIAMS

Well, suh, 'tweren't no one but—[*He pauses a moment.*] Wilson Byrd.

LUCY

Byrd! [*Springing to her feet with the shock.*]

WILLIAMS

[*After watching the two a moment.*] So you ain' got de money no mo', is you? [*They are speechless before him.*] I knows you ain' 'ca'se I knows who has got hit.

MADISON

[*Involuntarily.*] Who?

WILLIAMS

I has. [*He observes them and then chuckles softly.*] I has de money an' de bargum's closed, fer de goods is bin delivered an' dey're right in dis room in dat corner. One guitar at eight hunderd dollahs. Instermments comes higher'n what dey did once but you would have it an' now you got it an' everybody's fixed.

MADISON

[*Groaning and bending over the table.*] Oh!

WILLIAMS

Yassuh, de man what buys guitars at dat price su'tinly plays on de golden strings. Eight hunderd fer one guitar makes 'm mighty near twenty thousand dollahs er dozen. De cos'

er livin' is shore gone up but ef you mus' you mus'.

MADISON

Oh!

WILLIAMS

Well, I cain' stay heah, I got er be amblin' on. I much erblige ter you to mek youah plans to move out er heah fo' I got ter sell de house befo' sundown. Well, so long, an' I hopes you gits all de good er youah high price music. [*He turns again with his feeble old man's step toward the doorway, putting on his hat.*] I wish y'all good evenin'.

MADISON

[*Moving toward him with the threatening determination of despair.*] Say, I've got to have dat money. I sees red. I'm gone bad an' I'll kill befo' I'll lose hit.

[*WILLIAMS suddenly turns with a swiftness and agility astounding in so old a man. Starting forward he confronts MADISON with such dominance and fire that he seems suddenly to tower.*]

WILLIAMS

You kill me! You tek money away from me!
Why, you po' grain er chaff, you don' know me.
I'm a king in my own right. I got ways an'

means er pertecktin' myse'f dat you don' even dream on an' I don' need to lay a finge' on you to do hit. Furdermo' I could brain you wif dis stick but ef you cross me I won' be dat easy on you. Ef you don' wan' wuss'n dat don' cross me no furder er youah troubles'll begin fer fa'r.

LUCY

Oh, please don' lay nothin' on him.

WILLIAMS

You po' sufferin' gal, I won' lay nothin' onto 'im but I'm agoin' to tek sumpin' off'n you. I'm goin' tek de burding er dish yere pack er laziness off'n you. An' fus' I wants ter show you dish yere piece er papeh. [*He produces a folded document and opens it.*] Does yo' know who wrote it? Answeh me. [*He shoves the paper under MADISON'S eye.*]

MADISON

It looks like dat Wilson Byrd's writin'.

WILLIAMS

Yassuh, an' what's mo' it is dat man's writin'. It's his confession dat he fo'ge Lucy Sparrow's name. I saw dat man steal my guitar an' follered him home. Dah I grabbed him, dah I foun' de purse wif Lucy's name inside an' dah I made dat thief write out his confession.

Knowed so much of his meanness already dat he had to do hit. An' now I owns you. Does you undehstan' dat? Answeh me.

MADISON

Yas suh, no suh.

WILLIAMS

Well, I'll take'n cl'ar up de myst'ry fer you. I got dis confession outer Byrd an' I got other things ter prove hit an' I kin bring him an' you too, bofe befo' de gran' jury.

LUCY

Oh, my sweet Jesus, save him. [*The old man stands watching the two before him for some time in silence. LUCY falls on her knees before him.*] Oh, don't sen' Madison to de lawyers.

WILLIAMS

No, Lucy, I ain' wishful ter.

LUCY

You won't?

WILLIAMS

Mebbe not. But fus', les' put all dis talk aside dat I bin talkin' up to now. I bin puttin' on an' pretendin' in ordeh ter try you bofe an' sif' de chaff from de grain in you. I des bin playin'

wif you ter see how good you is an' how ornry dish yere man er youahn is. Yit I'll take an' give him er chance even so, an' I'll pluck him f'um de bu'nin' ef he follers de paf I p'int's out ter him. But we all got ter have cl'ar unde'stan'in' 'bout dat. Fus' an' fo'mos' youah money is all safe wif me. De house is youah'n.

LUCY

You means you sell it fer de money.

WILLIAMS

In co'se. You didn't speck I'd steal too, like a w'ite man, did you? I'll fetch you de deeds fo' hit fus' thing in de mo'nin'.

LUCY

Oh, fu'give me, I was all mix up. But you won' sen' Madison to de gran' jury neitheh?

WILLIAMS

I say I ain' honin' ter.

LUCY

Oh, my Makeh, I thank Thee fo' Thy mercy.

WILLIAMS

But I shorely goin' to put dis man er youah'n th'oo er tes' ter see whetheh he's fitten ter keep out er jail. Madison, will you tek er tes'?

MADISON

[*Humbly.*] Yassuh. What is it?

WILLIAMS

A guitar.

MADISON

A guitar!

WILLIAMS

Yassuh, dat's hit, no mo' ner no less. I'm goin' give you dat guitar—but—dere's suh-tinly goin' to be a string tied to it. You kin take dat guitar but you got to make somethin' outer yourself wif her or back she'll come to me. You kin give lessons an' learn folks music or you kin write down de music you make, but you got to do somethin' wif it fer Lucy. You got to wake up or I'll take de guitar. Which'll it be? Make youah choice.

MADISON

[*Crushed.*] I'll—keep de guitar.

WILLIAMS

An' dat ain' all. You got ter quit runnin' wif Byrd an' Byrd wif you, you got ter be a better husban' an' you got to min' everything Lucy tells you. Will you do hit?

MADISON

Yassuh.

WILLIAMS

An' yo' ain' much of er temp'unce man
neitheh, is you, Madison?

MADISON

I's a temp'unce man but I ain' no frantic.

WILLIAMS

Well, suh, you got ter jine de frantics now.
No dram drinking at all. Will you quit hit er
go ter jail?

MADISON

I'll quit.

WILLIAMS

Well, dat's on'y a promise but I'll shore hol'
you to hit er put you behin' de bahs. Why, look
heah, man, does you know how you stan' 'pon
top er dis yu'th? Does you know how you
liken to er tree? 'Sposin' sumpin' wif er cool
eye like er tree could see you an' talk. I cain'
jedge you ca'm but er tree could. Tree would
look at you an' say, "Does dat 'ere man wu'k?"
Win' 'ud whispeh, "No." "Do he eat?"
"Yas 'n git fat," respon' de win'. "Who shines
on him?" "His wife," win' say. "Do he put
fo'th flower an' bless de wife?" say de tree.

"No." "Do he give shade an' shelteh ter de wife?" say de tree. "No." "Well, chop'm down an' bu'n him befo' he rots," say de tree. "Dat's all." But mebbe I kin mek mo' of him dan dat an' so I'll try prunin' him an' graftin' some good labeh onto him. An' I kin' er think hit'll save him yit. Well'm, I must be er goin' now. Hit's late an' I mus' git my res' fer I got to do a lot er bossin' termorrer an dat's allers ha'd fer me. Lucy, I'll fetch you de deeds ter de house befo' nine termorrer an', Madison, you kin repo't to me at eight o'clock sha'p an' give my little boy a lesson on de guitar. You'll be dah, won't you?

MADISON

[*Meekly.*] Yassuh.

WILLIAMS

Ready to whu'l in an' scratch.

MADISON

Yassuh.

WILLIAMS

Well den, les' all shek han's on de noo nes' an' de noo aig. [*They shake hands. He puts on his hat and turns to the door.*] An' dat remin's me, Lucy, you better tell Madison to play on dat guitar a plenty tonight because he'll need music

fer to stan' up undeh all de lessons I'm goin' to lay onto him. Well, I wish you good night. I'm er gittin' kin'er ole an' I cain' stay up late no mo' without bein' crosser in de mornin'. Good night den an' far' you well bofe. Eight o'clock, Madison. Good night.

[He goes, closing the door after him. The pair stand silent for a moment, MADISON with hanging head and in deep dejection.]

LUCY

[Throwing her arms around him.] Oh, my husban', I'll pray fer you. Don' sorrer now. Git youah res' tonight. We kin be hones' now. We've got de house at las' an heah's de guitar.

MADISON

Yassuh, heah's de guitar. *[He plays it and fondles it. Then his face assumes again its melancholy look.]*

LUCY

What's de trouble?

MADISON

I don' undehstan' dis worl'. If I wants to make music why cain't folks lemme alone to make music? If I dream a fine dream why is it I always wake up? Looks to me like somebody's

always tryin' to crowd me out an' git me in a tight place.

LUCY

You wuz doin' all right till you got mix up wif dat white man an' his tricks. De trouble wuz dat dis dream of youahs wuzn't a good dream.

MADISON

Yes, but not all of my dreams is bad ones. All, I wants is room to dream my good dreams an' make my own music.

CURTAIN

SIMON THE CYRENIAN

NOTE.—Although Cyrene was in northern Africa, the wall-paintings in the vast Cyrenian tombs depict black people instead of brown.

That Jesus' cross-bearer was a black man, as the early painters represented him, is a fact that holds a certain suggestion bearing upon a phase of modern society.

It has been the author's design that all the characters in this play should be represented by persons entirely or partly of Negro blood; and this intention has been carried out in the original stage production. Simon is a full-blooded Negro, Battus is a little less dark, Acte is a mulatto as were most Egyptians of the later dynasties. Her attendants comprise both mulattoes and Negroes. The Roman characters are played by persons of slighter negroid strain.

SIMON THE CYRENIAN

And as they led him away they laid hold upon one Simon, a Cyrenian, . . . and on him they laid the cross that he might bear it after Jesus.

Luke 23, 26.

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

PROCLA, the wife of Pilate

DRUSUS, a young Roman

ACTE, Princess of Egypt

BATTUS, a Libyan prince, a boy

SIMON

PILATE, governor of Judea

BARABBAS, an insurrectionist

THE MOCKER WITH THE SCOURGE

THE MOCKER WITH THE SCARLET ROBE

THE MOCKER WITH THE CROWN OF THORNS

A CENTURION

LONGINUS, a soldier

PROCLA'S ATTENDANTS

ACTE'S ATTENDANTS

SOLDIERS

TIME—The day of the Crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth

SCENE: *A garden of Pilate's house at Jerusalem.*

The whole scene is strictly Roman, softened by its eastern location and by the beginnings of Rome's decadence, but there is no trace of Judean influence. At the back there is a gallery or raised portico reaching entirely across the garden. It is roofed but open and beyond it the morning sky is seen. This passageway, which will be called the portico, leads from the Praetorium on the left to other buildings on the right. The garden has entrances toward the back at both left and right. At the left, near the front, a narrow portion of the façade of Pilate's house is seen, with a doorway reached by three steps. At the right of the garden, near the front, there is a wall fountain. There is a marble seat at back centre. All the architecture is of mellow marble as dark as alabaster.

[*As the curtain rises PROCULA is discovered upon the steps of her house. She is in an extreme state of agitation. Her attendants are in the garden. The sound of a mob, with cries of "Crucify him," "To the Place of the Skull," "On to Golgotha," etc. is heard at the rise of the curtain and at intervals throughout the play.*]

PROCLA

Go! Go, send more messengers. Ah, Hera, help me.

[A MESSENGER runs into the garden from the right and kneels before her, breathless.]

PROCLA

Has Simon the Cyrenian been found?

MESSENGER

The swiftest horseman reached him. He is nearing the city.

PROCLA

Hasten him. Bring him. Your freedom for it. [*The MESSENGER hurries out.*]

PROCLA

[*To ATTENDANTS.*] Is there no news yet?

ATTENDANT

One messenger has not returned. He who was sent to the royal woman of Egypt.

PROCLA

Send others after him, take wings. [DRUSUS enters the garden from the left.] Drusus! Help me draw him swiftly.

DRUSUS

The wife of Pilate speaks. Whom shall I send to her?

PROCLA

Too late, too late. I speak foolishly. I have already sent.

DRUSUS

You are tormented.

PROCLA

Are mine the only eyes that see the doom unrolling?

DRUSUS

You speak strangely.

PROCLA

The Furies whip me.

DRUSUS

Tell me your secret.

PROCLA

This Jesus the Nazarene—

DRUSUS

You need not fear him. He is in Pilate's hands.

PROCLA

Out of that is my agony. Ah, my dream.

DRUSUS

Dreams?—

PROCLA

Did you feel the earth heave last night?

DRUSUS

I was drinking at Herod's palace.

PROCLA

Trees groaned, the statues shuddered, the fountains dried, the walls sweated, a red dew fell in the gardens.

DRUSUS

I felt nothing. I saw nothing.

PROCLA

I saw—I cannot tell it. Horror was heaped on horror.

DRUSUS

You dreamed of this Nazarene?

PROCLA

Of him. He must not die. I begged his life of Pilate but he fears the Jews. Help me.

DRUSUS

Help you? How?

PROCLA

Bring Simon the Cyrenian.

DRUSUS

That tiger?

PROCLA

I heard many voices in my dream and one voice cried, "Simon the African shall bear the burden."

DRUSUS

You have not felt his claws.

PROCLA

Then you too believe him dangerous?

DRUSUS

The most dangerous man in the empire.

PROCLA

Dangerous to Romans, it may be, but—

DRUSUS

[*Scornfully.*] The friend of slaves! Wherever he goes insurrection follows him. He was the secret leader of last year's armed uprising in Rome when thirty thousand perished. He hollows out the empire with sedition.

PROCLA

A stronger man than Rome.

DRUSUS

His influence spreads through the provinces.
He plans world empire, undermining Rome.
Cæsar has been warned of him, but is afraid
or listless.

PROCULA

[*Half to herself.*] Surely such power should
avail to save one life.

DRUSUS

There is a rumour that he was here two nights
ago to renew the insurrection of Barabbas. We
had spies set upon him.

PROCULA

Does he fear spies? I have sent for this man.
If the Nazarene is condemned Simon must
kindle riot and take him from the soldiers.

DRUSUS

Will the wife of Pilate breed rebellion to
Rome?

PROCULA

It is for Rome's sake and in my extremity.
What singing is that? I heard it in my dream.

[*During the last few speeches a marching song
by men's and women's voices is heard off left,
at first faintly then, growing louder; the words
are indistinguishable.*]

DRUSUS

The air is African.

PROCLA

May it be Simon.

DRUSUS

[*Looking off left.*] A litter with Ethiopian bearers.

PROCLA

Ethiopians! It is the Egyptian. [DRUSUS starts to go off right.]

PROCLA

Though I sent for her I fear her. Stay with me.

DRUSUS

I cannot. I bear word from Pilate to Herod. [*He goes off right.* A HERALD in Egyptian dress enters from left.]

THE HERALD

Acte of Egypt to the wife of Pilate.

[*The voices off left are heard approaching and singing the tune that today is known as the Negro spiritual "Walk Together, Children."* ACTE enters from left walking with her litter-bearers and women. With her is BATTUS, a boy of ten.]

ACTE

The wife of Pilate sent to me?

PROCULA

For Simon the Cyrenian. Men say you are his friend.

ACTE

I have come here to find him.

PROCULA

He is not here.

ACTE

If his mood holds he will not fail to come since you have sent for him. Your men have told me that he nears the city.

PROCULA

Oh, help me rouse him when he comes.

ACTE

What is your need?

PROCULA

A hidden service.

ACTE

You ask my aid? Then trust me.

PROCULA

[*Coming down close to ACTE and speaking in a low voice.*] Jesus the Nazarene must not die.

ACTE

Has he been doomed?

PROCLA

Not yet. But if—

ACTE

Are you not Pilate's wife?

PROCLA

He fears the Jews.

ACTE

And Simon?

PROCLA

If Jesus is condemned Simon must seize him.

ACTE

Never.

PROCLA

It must be done. I beg you help me.

ACTE

This Nazarene has no friend in me.

PROCLA

And you have never seen him.

ACTE

No, but I suffer much because of him.

PROCLA

And I. Jesus must live. Oh, move Simon to strike.

ACTE

More lives than this magician's wait on Simon. [*An ATTENDANT of PROCLA enters from left.*]

ATTENDANT

[*Calling.*] Pilate has gone up toward the Judgment Hall.

PROCLA

Beg him to stay for me, for one word more. I'll follow. [*ATTENDANT goes out left. To ACTE.*] Command my household, wait here for Simon. [*Seizing ACTE and pointing toward the Judgment Hall.*] In there and at this hour the fate of earth and heaven dangles in the hands of blind men. Tell Simon this, see that his eyes are open.

[*PROCLA hastens into her house. During Procla's words one of Acte's ATTENDANTS, who has strayed off right has reëntered, looking off.*]

ATTENDANT

Lord Simon rushes toward this place.

ACTE

Make ready all.

[*Her tire-women attend her and her men stand*

looking expectantly off right. SIMON enters from right. He is a Negro of majestic bearing, with a sad, severe countenance. He is dressed as a soldier.]

SIMON

Egypt!

BATTUS

[Rushing joyfully toward SIMON.] Simon, Simon.

SIMON

Battus, Royal Battus. *[He embraces the boy.]*

BATTUS

You have been long away.

SIMON

Not so long as to have forgotten Battus.

BATTUS

And have you forgotten Cyrene and Egypt and our kingdom of the free? *[ACTE hushes the boy, looking apprehensively about.]*

SIMON

No, Battus.

ACTE

[To her ATTENDANTS.] Take the boy deeper in the garden. Wait there till I call him. *[The ATTENDANTS lead BATTUS off left.]*

ACTE

[*Moving swiftly to SIMON.*] You are in danger here. What sorcery called you back?

SIMON

Where is the wife of Pilate?

ACTE

She is asleep—or she listens to the harp.

SIMON

Why are you here?

ACTE

I came to meet you. Why did you return?

SIMON

Messengers from the wife of Pilate reached me.

ACTE

What spell is on you, you who were never trapped? This is the wolf's own mouth. You tempt it to close upon you.

SIMON

The tiger's blood is never lapped by wolves.

ACTE

Many can pull down one. Go back.

SIMON

When is the Nazarene to be tried by Pilate?

ACTE

So, I have found the hunter that has snared you.

SIMON

When is he to be tried?

ACTE

Who knows? Tomorrow. Perhaps never.

SIMON

Today, the message said.

ACTE

Perhaps this afternoon. Oh, Simon, wake. Shake off this net of dreams. How were you taken in it?

SIMON

I am not taken.

ACTE

You have seen this Nazarene?

SIMON

I saw him.

ACTE

When?

SIMON

Two nights ago.

ACTE

After you left me.

SIMON

Afterward. I had summoned to a garden
The bravest of the slaves to help them plan
A new sedition that would free Barabbas.
There as I roused the jungles against Rome
I saw lights in another part of the garden,
I saw men come with torches and seize a man.
I hurried near and through the olive leaves
His eyes looked into mine,
His eyes burned into mine. I have seen them
since,
Waking or sleeping.

ACTE

You followed him?

SIMON

No, and none saw me. I turned back through
the shadows and joined my men.

ACTE

And did you plot again that night?

SIMON

My thoughts went wide. My words were
broken.

I told the slaves to wait till my next coming.
Then, before dawn, I set out for the sea.

ACTE

Oh, my Cyrenian, where is that fierce blood
That poured out from your heart fires to burn
Rome?

SIMON

My spirit is fiercer than it was before,
The groans of the oppressed louder than ever.

ACTE

Then why have you turned back?

SIMON

I have seen the whole world's sorrow in one
man's eyes.

ACTE

What does it mean? You are changed.

SIMON

There as I looked upon him in the garden
A wound came in my side like a spear's thrust,
Bleeding for him.

ACTE

Is this all you know of him?

SIMON

As I went seaward
I met men coming to the yearly feast.
These told me of his works, they spoke of
marvels,

Of healings and of resurrections.
He suffers the old wrong of the downtrodden.

ACTE

Are there no wrongs then in our Africa?

SIMON

The whole earth groans beneath the persecuted;

The outcast, the despised cry out to me.

ACTE

And you whom they trust to save them turn aside

To this one man.

SIMON

I have not turned aside, yet I may help him.

ACTE

Go back. Your peril grows. You will be trapped.

SIMON

Rome cannot take me.

ACTE

It is not Rome I fear but this Judean.

SIMON

[Moving toward the doorway of Pilate's house.]

Why does the wife of Pilate stay,
Having summoned me with horsemen?

ACTE

[Going with him.] Doubtless she forgets.
Her whims are many.

SIMON

I must hear from her
What they have done with him.

ACTE

[Placing herself before him.] Simon!

Mists are before your eyes,
Mists of forgetting.

You have forgotten Battus and all your holy
vows before the priests of Libya and Egypt to
bring him back to Africa Rome's conqueror.

*[She calls off left to BATTUS. The ATTENDANTS
enter with him.]*

Come, lad, sit here. *[She leads him to a seat
at centre.]* Let's play at worlds for Simon. Who
are you?

BATTUS

I am Battus.

ACTE

And who is Battus?

BATTUS

Son of Cyrenian kings and kings of Egypt,
Son of all Africa.

ACTE

Who shall be your army?

BATTUS

The slaves of Rome.

ACTE

Who shall lead them up to victory?

BATTUS

Simon and I.

ACTE

And then?

BATTUS

They shall be free. All wrongs shall be
righted.

The great shall be brought low, the lowly
raised.

ACTE

How shall we reach our own?

BATTUS

Through blood and fire.

ACTE

Who shall be our own?

BATTUS

All those who suffer wrongs, the poor, the captives.

ACTE

[*To SIMON.*] What do you say, now you have heard the faith he lives by?

SIMON

Oh, I have not forgotten. We shall go forward.

ACTE

To triumph.

SIMON

Yes, to triumph.

ACTE

Through fire and blood.

SIMON

Through fire and blood.

ACTE

Ah, I have never doubted the fierce heart in you. Never be tamed.

[*PROCLA appears in her doorway. ACTE sees her and moves apprehensively aside. PROCLA sees SIMON.*]

PROCUA

You are the Libyan captain?

[ACTE waves BATTUS and her attendants off left.]

SIMON

The wife of Pilate sees him.

PROCUA

[Going swiftly to him.] You have seen Jesus the Nazarene?

SIMON

I have seen him.

PROCUA

Save him.

SIMON

When is he to be tried?

PROCUA

He has been tried.

SIMON

[To ACTE.] Who has deceived me? [To PROCUA.] Has he been condemned?

PROCUA

Not yet, not yet.

SIMON

Your husband holds him.

PROCLA

I have no power in this.

SIMON

You sent for me.

PROCLA

Save this one man. I know your power.

ACTE

Remember Cyrene, Egypt and our world,
Battus and Africa.

SIMON

Their roots are in my heart.

ACTE

Then come away with me.

SIMON

My breast can nourish both this Judean and
our kingdom.

ACTE

No, for this man's spirit threatens to over-
come you; they have called him king; there can-
not be two kings, and you the lesser, in the
world we plan.

SIMON

Not that he is a king but that he is a captive
my heart flows most to him.

ACTE

Legions of captives in the empire wait for you
to set them free. Shall you yourself be captive?

PROCLA

He was betrayed.

ACTE

[To SIMON.] Look to it that you are not your-
self betrayed by him.

PROCLA

Herod mocked him.

ACTE

[To SIMON.] If you are now led astray you
mock our Africa and the new world we plan
there.

SIMON

Plan no more worlds if this man is destroyed.
But he shall conquer Pilate.

PROCLA

Save him. Waken the mob. Breed riot.
Take him from the soldiers.

*[She suddenly looks upward off left back and
gives a cry.]*

Pilate ascends to the outer judgment seat.

[She rushes to SIMON.]

Burn the city if he is condemned.

[SIMON *stands brooding motionless.* PROCULA *runs toward her doorway.*]

I'll send to Pilate even on the judgment seat.

[*She rushes into her house.* SIMON *moves after her as though he would follow.*]

ACTE

[*Recalling him by a touch so that he turns.*] The time is not yet ripe. A new sedition now suddenly bursting would dash down all our dreams.

SIMON

Pilate at last will listen. With such a pleader the Sufferer is safe.

ACTE

You are taken in this soothsayer's mesh.

SIMON

He has not spoken to me.

ACTE

Has he not led you?

SIMON

He leads me most who suffers most injustice.

ACTE

And on that night when you were first led
captive

The lonely lions and the Libyan moon
Watched over Africa, faithful to her,
When you grew faithless.

SIMON

Africa shall triumph. This man, not I, not
Battus, shall restore her.

ACTE

If Pilate pleases.

SIMON

He shall conquer Pilate.

ACTE

Shall he indeed?

SIMON

What's there?

[A loud murmur of many voices has been heard
at intervals in the Praetorium at left back
during the past scene. This murmur has
now increased into a roar out of which the
cry "Crucify him! Crucify him!" rises. The
cries and the roar suddenly become trium-
phant as SIMON listens. Then from the

entrance at right there appears a fantastic impish figure bearing a great scourge. He is followed by another bearing a gorgeous scarlet robe and by a third bearing upon a cushion a crown of thorns.]

SIMON

What are these?

THE MOCKER WITH THE SCOURGE

A scourge for a prophet.

THE MOCKER WITH THE CROWN OF THORNS

A crown of thorns for a king.

THE MOCKER WITH THE SCARLET ROBE

A scarlet robe for a saviour.

[The mockers cross the garden and disappear at left back. SIMON watches them motionless and transfixed by their sinister meaning as it begins to dawn upon him. PILATE appears in the upper portico at back left. He enters walking slowly backward and looking off left with evident horror. A wailing is heard off left, it grows and PROCULA enters from her doorway.]

PROCULA

Woe, woe, the air is bleeding, the doom has fallen.

O Pilate, you have judged a world and doomed it.

Your hands are bloody; wash them again, wash them.

[PILATE glances at her and then motions, looking off to the left. A slave appears with him on the portico bearing a basin of water. PILATE washes his hands and then goes off left.]

PROCUA

[Going to SIMON who stands motionless.] What will you do now, now that he is condemned?

[A man enters slowly from the right. He halts just within the garden seeing SIMON. The newcomer is gaunt and haggard.]

SIMON

[Suddenly seeing him.] Barabbas! [Running to ACTE.] Look to the lad, lead him to safety. We'll fire the city. Hide with him till I join you. The temple shall be in flames before they lead the Nazarene past it. [ACTE leading BATTUS and her people hurries out left. SIMON rushes to BARABBAS, speaking swiftly.] Go where the arms are stored. Give the slaves weapons and torches. Rouse all, arm all, stand by me to free the Nazarene. I'll lead his friends. Bring the slaves quickly. Strike, give all the signal. [BARABBAS stands motionless.] Go.

BARABBAS

[*In a dull monotonous voice.*] All's done, all's one, whether men live or die.

Who can withstand Rome? They tortured me.

My spirit is broken. I have been all night
Watching this one that would have saved the
world

Scourged with me in the prison.

He is a god but men have conquered him.

They freed me in his place, the dead for the
living.

There are no more gods left now in the sky
And on the earth nothing but dead men
crawling.

SIMON

You stay? You hang back?

BARABBAS

My spirit is poisoned. I die soon.

SIMON

Then die for the living.

BARABBAS

There are none left alive.

[*As he speaks the tops of three crosses and three
Roman standards are seen against the sky
at back, beyond the portico, as they are borne*

slowly in procession from left to right. As they pass, the wailing of women's voices is heard interspersed with the angry murmur of a crowd and cries of "Crucify him!"]

BARABBAS

[*Pointing to the crosses.*] There goes the cross now for the god to hang on,
That's the dead tree to bear the dead world's fruit.

SIMON

So we must stand alone. They yell for blood.
Now they shall drown in a red sea of it.
He shall pass over safely, walking on dead men.

[*He draws his sword and rushes off right.*

BARABBAS stands unmoved. PROCULA runs to right entrance staring off after SIMON.]

PROCULA

The gods fight with you now, invisible shapes
Rush forward with you. See how cloud-like armies

Redden the air. Lead them and seize him.

[*There is a pause, then she retreats slowly from the entrance, and SIMON re-enters stepping slowly backward as though dazzled by a vision. As he reaches the middle of the garden a*

wonderful voice is heard proceeding from the direction in which he looks.]

THE VOICE

Put up the sword. For they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. [*The sword falls from SIMON'S hand.*]

THE VOICE

Do not resist evil.

[*There is a moment's pause and then a CENTURION enters from the right and goes menacingly up to SIMON.*]

THE CENTURION

Who are you that you rush against legionaries? Have you an army that you come against us? Are you a madman? Are you also one of his followers?

SIMON

[*Slowly.*] I am his follower. [*PROCLA, wailing, rushes into her house.*]

THE CENTURION

[*Turning and calling to someone off right.*] Ho, Longinus, come; here is another. [*To SIMON.*] What is your name and place?

SIMON

Simon, a man of Cyrene.

[LONGINUS enters from the right accompanied by several other legionaries.]

LONGINUS

[To the CENTURION.] The Nazarene has fallen. The cross crushes him. He can go no further.

THE CENTURION

Here's one to bear it, bring it in the garden.

[LONGINUS goes out right. The CENTURION and legionaries surround SIMON and strip him of his outer garments. When they have done so the MOCKER WITH THE SCOURGE enters from the right waving the scourge threateningly, looking off as he enters. He turns and dances about SIMON.]

THE MOCKER WITH THE SCOURGE

Prophecy, prophecy. Who is it now that strikes you? Turn the other cheek.

[The mocker strikes SIMON. With a powerful movement SIMON seizes the mocker, hurls him to the ground and snatching his sword which the soldiers have placed upon a bench he clears a space about him and starts again toward the right entrance.]

THE VOICE

Overcome evil with good. Forgive your enemy.

[SIMON bows his head, then extends the hilt of his sword to a soldier who takes it and strikes him with the flat of the blade. SIMON submits, dumbly, with bowed head, to this and to the MOCKER WITH THE SCOURGE who rises painfully from the ground and again strikes him viciously.]

THE MOCKER WITH THE SCOURGE

Turn the other cheek.

[He takes a rope from his girdle and making a noose in it puts the noose over SIMON's head and dances about him holding the rope's end. THE MOCKER WITH THE ROBE enters from the right.]

THE MOCKER WITH THE ROBE

Here is the scarlet robe, it fell from the King's shoulders, Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. Of such are the Kingdom of Heaven. [He places the robe on SIMON.]

Hail to the new king, Simon of Cyrene,
King of the Africans, with his Master's robe.

[The wailing of women outside has risen in a strain of wild and profound melancholy. It is broken by a woman's scream.]

THE VOICE

Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me,
but weep for yourselves and for your children.
For if they do these things in a green tree what
shall be done in the dry?

[THE MOCKER WITH THE CROWN OF THORNS
enters from right.]

THE MOCKER WITH THE CROWN OF THORNS

Ho, another king, another saviour. Solomon
in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.
Let him be crowned. Blessed are the meek.

*[He snatches off SIMON'S head-dress, throwing
it on the ground. He pretends to place the
thorn crown on SIMON'S head, and then
throws it contemptuously at his feet. The
legionaries enter with the cross.]*

THE VOICE

If any man will come after me let him take
up the cross and follow me.

*[The legionaries place the cross upon SIMON.
He bends beneath it and picking up the crown
of thorns places it upon his head.]*

SIMON

I will wear this, I will bear this till he comes
into his own.

CURTAIN



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